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PART I : Land, History and People

1. General Orientation:

A. Definition of Terms:

The Amhara culture dealt with in this study is to a considerable extent identified with the culture formerly referred to as "Abyssinian". Actually, the Abyssinian culture, heir to the cultural blending of ancient Semitic and African traits, has developed into several sub-cultures of which the Amhara culture is the major one. Another important sub-culture would be that of the Tigre-speaking population of Eritrea.

The term "Abyssinia", which was the official name of the country until the 20th century, is possibly derived from the name the centrally-located river Awash, which flows in the Rift Valley bisecting the country, losing itself in the eastern lowland desert on its way to the Red Sea coast. Another explanation derives it from the Habashat, one of the Semitic tribes from Hadhramaut, which crossed over the Bab El Mandeb about 500 B.C. A third explanation derives the name from the Arabic term signifying racial mixture.

The present Emperor preferred the official name Ethiopia, the political frontiers of which include the territory of non-Abyssinian peoples like the Galla, conquered by Abyssinia in the late 19th century. "Ethiopia", derived from the Greek term signifying "people with sunburned faces", was used in classical antiquity to describe all Africa south of the Sahara.

The religion of the Amhara and most other "Abyssinian" peoples is an early, Monophysite form of Christianity, often

referred to as "Coptic", although the Abyssinian Copts prefer the term "Towado" meaning Orthodox. The term Copt is derived from the Greek term for "Egyptian." Since the Coptic Metropolitan of Alexandria, Egypt, was also head of the Abyssinian Church and appointed all Abyssinian archbishops until recent years of the reign of the present Emperor, there is some justification for the use of the term Coptic. It will be used in this study, to indicate the "Abyssinian Church of Ethiopia".

In books on Ethiopia, one often finds the term "Amhara" used in a broad sense as synonymous with Abyssinian Coptic Christian. Although the Amhara in their ethnocentrism also use it in this sense, it is not good usage in the author's opinion. The Tigrinya-speaking peoples of the province of Tigre are also good "Copts", in religious belief and observance; however, they differ from the Amhara in many phases of culture, and, according to native opinion, in personality". Therefore, the term Amhara is used in this study only for the Amharic-speaking, Coptic population of the provinces of Begemdir(Gondar), Gojjam, and parts of Shoa. Formerly, all three provinces were included in a territorial unit called Amhara; hence the name.

B. Linguistic Definitions

There are three major linguistic families in Ethiopia: Cushitic, Semitic and Nilotic. Cushitic is predominant, roughly speaking, in the southern half of modern Ethiopia, including Galla, Somali, Sidamo, Agau, etc. Nilotic languages predominate along the northern and western escarp-

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137 remedies. The nutmeg tree, tosiya, is also medicinal, and
924 the Kosso tree is widely used against tapeworm. Common sights include the reddish ret, a cactus; and just as soon as the rainy season ends, the yellow daisy, adäy abäba carpets the landscape, heralding the masqal holiday. Hence it
136 is also called mäsqäl abäba. A study of the FAUNA connections between Ethiopia and surrounding areas contributes significantly to the understanding of Ethiopia's cultures from ancient times to the present.

The last remnant of the prehistoric belt of tropical forest that once stretched from Africa to India, is found today in Dhofar, Southern Arabia. There, in the Gara mountains, Bertram Thomas collected fossil fauna which is definitely Ethiopic and which also evidences links to southern India.[8] Animal husbandry in Yemen in prehistoric times was apparently based on hump-necked cattle of Indian origin. This cattle complex reached Africa late, probably as late
[231] as 1000 B.C.[9] To this day, the cattle of Ethiopia is hump-necked, though cave paintings clearly show domestic cattle without humps.

171 Social and religious regulations associated with the
231 cattle complex among the Cushitic-speaking tribesmen of southern Ethiopia, are very similar to sets of the same regulations among the Gara tribesmen of Dhofar. Both despise hunters and artisans, but also consider agriculture a most ignoble occupation.

8. Coon: Southern Arabia. Papers of the Peabody Museum, Vol.20., 1943, p. 209.
9. Ibid.

241 cereal, as well as other crops already mentioned are grown. The lowest and warmest spots of the plateau are usually used for various types of millet-sorghum, gesho (hops). Coffee grows wild or is purchased on the market, as are bananas from the lowland. After a few years of cultivation, a field may be left fallow for five or more years.

●[17] [46] [23] The Amhara's irrigation and terrace farming resemble those of Yemen, not of Africa. Farming is man's work, not woman's. The one-handed plow is drawn by a yoke of two oxen, encouraged by a long fibre whip. The Amhara rarely uses other animals for drawing the plow.

Fallow land or new bush is broken during the dry season. A heavier-than-usual iron plow point is purchased from the Falasha ironsmiths, affixed to the scratch plow, and the area, after preliminary burning, is scratched many times at right angles. The stubble and weeds are then piled and burned. But for the actual plowing and seeding, the beginning of the rains is awaited.

312 Irrigation canals are completely washed out in the rainy season, and must be rebuilt in each dry season. Terracing is less common than irrigation, but on occasion mountain farmers of long residence do build low walls of rock and mud on hillsides to prevent severe washouts and landslides during the rainy season.

243 Tyēff (Eragrostic abyssinica; Poa abyssinica) deserves the latter Latin name, for it is the mainstay staple of Abyssinia, except in the south. It is an annual indigenous grass with seeds of pinhead size, cultivated

321 415 The Amhara warrior sought to have at least one very large horn containing mead (cattle was sometimes bred for large horns or bought from Galla), and smaller ones for gunpowder or for the staple mixture of salt and barbare, or nug paste. The narrow end is sealed with a wooden plug. In the past they were sometimes of buffalo horn, but now mostly of cow's horn. One observer noticed a striking similarity between this container and ancient Egyptian ones of smaller size, used to contain antimony for eye toilette.[65]

[71]

Perhaps this may give a clue as to why the drinking utensils made of horn look so strikingly European, amid the other Amhara containers which are more African than Middle Eastern. Nearly every Amhara peasant has at least one large drinking cup of horn; besides the usual clay cups used for coffee. The large horn cup is used by the head of the house for barley beer. Churches usually have several, especially the "tewa" used at church feasts or memorial feasts such as tazkar. An average-sized one measures about 4-1/2 inches high, has a 5 inch diameter at the top, but only 1-1/2 inche diameter at the bottom. A church which has a large working retinue of däbtära and hangers-on, acolytes, etc., often makes a practice of giving one as a courtesy gift to deserving peasants at plowing time, with the blessings of the church for a good harvest.

324 412 The main stone utensil that men make for the house is the mano-type stone called "mäj", usually selected from a river bed and further shaped so that the bottom is flat and the rounded top fits comfortably into the palm of the housewife when she grinds the grain. She does this by a forward and backward motion, not the more advanced rotary

65. Cohen, Marcel: Flacon Abyssin en corne...Tr, Paris 1920, pp.265-6.

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PART III: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

171 Some aspects of the social organization of the Amhara resemble those of medieval Europe at early and middle periods; others the ancient and not so ancient Middle East; still others, perhaps a smaller part, parallel patterns in other parts of Africa. It is an "old-world" pattern of human relationships, both in structure and function, and the noteworthy fact is that much has survived, due to comparative isolation, that has changed elsewhere.

186 Amhara attitudes, concomitant with their social organization, recall the attitude of the "Neolithic pattern of human relations" in Coon's terminology.[69] This pattern is characterized by the attitude: "You stay in your village, and I stay in mine. If your sheep eat our grass we will kill you. Anyone who tries to change our ways is a witch and we will kill him."

In Amhara rural areas--and most Amhara are rural--this attitude still seems to dominate human relations, be they structured as territorial, class, military, legal, ethnic, religious or racial. Feuds between kin groups often last for several generations; loyalties are intensely regional and ethnocentric.

178 While all this can still be observed, change in the direction of modern occidental patterns has begun to seep in very recently, affecting various phases of social organization in varying degrees. Sometimes the structure

69. Coon: The Story of Man. 1954.

685 the "danya". Interestingly enough, if the thief did
696 not have money on hand to pay the fee of the lēbashay, it was the responsibility of the victim who had originally requested his services to pay him on the spot, and try to collect later from the thief. This had the effect of eliminating complaints of petty theft from setting this costly process in motion.

694 It seems that amateur thieves were often caught
789 by this process, and usually confessed, feeling helpless when confronted with such "powerful" means of detection. Professional thieves, particularly in the towns, who were known to have evaded detection, were and are believed to have obtained a powerful magic antidote from a dabtara scribe.

694 When all methods of detection have failed, the
787 distraught victim has a last resort. He may go to the nearest "tänkwa", a practicer of black magic, and ask him to divine by throwing his bones. This , too, is now prohibited, but still goes on, though not as openly as before. Failing even in this, the victim may go to the Coptic church and there, having purchased incense
[754] and given a gift, pronounce a solemn curse, "säbätē masdäfat", on the thief.

• 171 The pattern of the lēbashay has been traced by
694 some observers to ancient Greek parallels, by others to the Arab bedouin "djirra" or "kassas" thiefseeker who also tracks murderers in tribal feuds. The tankwas seem of more typically African witchcraft pattern.

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695 661 er court, if he felt he had the means. In this case the judge might sometimes not appropriate the wager for fear of having to surrender it again later.

539 691 There are numerous proverbs characterizing roles in litigation, and counseling behavior and decisions to be made in certain situations:

"The young lawyer,
in the beginning he acclaims to heaven;
later on, he will look to the ground"
(Moral: always choose an old, experienced lawyer, with many reserve tricks up his sleeve).

"Don't seize the tail of the leopard;
but if you did, don't let go."
(Meaning: Don't go to court against a good talker, or "great man", or wealthy adversary; but once started, fight as hard as hard as you can, or else he will ruin you).

"Even if you know how,
against the judge do not debate".
"Judge, why your partiality?
the loser must pay you (anyway)".

"One witness need not make you tremble,
(just as) a one-eyed (person) cannot dance well."

[17] The pattern of the wager resembles, in part, that of the "khabdh" of Arab bedouin.[76]

76. Ibid.

694 dual's case, the "gubba" gift, continued, and it is often
[661] identical with a bribe. At the same time, the old cus-
178 tom which served as a last resort to a poor person to
have his injustice rectified, by appearing with a heavy
stone perched on the back of his neck almost crushing
him, was abrogated because Europeans looked on this as
primitive. The poor man thus has lost his few safeguards,
and now is losing evan the right to beg and to create a
traffic hazard by throwing himself before the vehicle of
• [171] the great man and shouting "abyet". (The practice of
carrying the rock resembles that of innocently accused
Arab Beduin who appear pressing a blade against their
necks to demonstrate and shout their innocence.

178 Transition thus proceeds in unequal shifts, with
671 many culture lags. Modernization of law and justice
643 proceeds from the top, Addis Ababa, down the pyramid.
One of the reasons for the circuit-riding of the emperor
himself is to remind the chiefs of his realm of his
all-seeing and all-hearing power, just as was done in
the past. He acts as inspector-general.

The Emperor and his High Court in Addis Ababa stil
give lip service to the Fetha Nägäst Code. But in prac-
tice, this amounts to little more than rationalization
for the benefit of the ultra-conservative Amhara nobles.
693 The position of the "afä negus" (lit. Mouthpiece of the
King), who traditionally was the guardian of theFatha Nä-
gäst code, has now become honorary in practice. In the
past he was the second-most powerful person in the realm,
trusted partly because he was not of the ruling family

795 off by cutting its throat.

It may be that the use of the formula became emphatic centuries ago, as an equivalent-though-distinctive counterpart to the Muslim formula "In the name of Allah the all-merciful, and Muhammad hid his prophet". Another such distinction is almost certainly the blue neck-cord, "mäṭäb" which both male and female Abyssinian Copts wear to distinguish them from Muslims. But their other religious laws and taboos seem to date back to the Old Testament observances of Judaism, notable the taboo on the pig, which is not even raised outside (European Addis Ababa.

795 779 As a consequence of the religiosity of the people, the rules of the church have the force of law, unchallenged especially in the rural areas. Even the more modernized administration and new legislation has made little change in the close inter-relation of church and state functions, at the grassroots level. This inter-relation is even closer in the form of social pressure. Foreign observers have remarked that without this church organization the social structure of the country would fall to pieces and lose its coherence.

795 Another significant factor is the large number of persons consecrated, or partly consecrated to the church service. Besides priests, monks and nuns there are boy deacons and church students, chorister-scribes, and other semi-laymen attached to the church, whose total number has been estimated at from 10% to 20% of the population, particularly the male population.

796 262 As soon as this is over, a period of intensive meat-eating begins, similar to European carne-vale (carnival), for the same reason: the long lenten period is approaching, and in Abyssinia this means also abstention from eggs, cheese, milk, and other animal products (some even avoid fish), just as on any Wednesday and Friday; and no food before noon, for the strictly observant. The fast is obeyed by nearly everyone, in all classes. This fast begins on the 22nd day of Yäkatit, and is called "kudade" (lit. suffering) to indicate both the suffering of Jesus and of the faster. It is also referred to as "arba tom"(lit. 40-fast) though in fact the fast lasts 55 days. Women prepare a variety of vegetable and grain dishes, to substitute for the absence of more solid food.

796 [[71] Finally, on the 17th day of the month of Miyazya, the long-awaited Easter, "Fassika" (related to the Hebrew Passover, "Pessah" etymologically), occurs.

It is the climax of a week of preparations during which the lenten "hudadey" sharpens. This week is called "hemamat" (passion, extreme suffering), and no work is done, symbolizing the sympathy withthe weakness and suffering of Jesus. Even the Saturday market is cancelled--the only time this happens.

[743] Purchasers of meat and supplies for Easter must do their shopping on Thursday, when a special big market is held. The price of sheep, etc., goes up sharply, even doubles, in anticipation of the feast. Even tyëff and pepper (bärbärë) become more expensive. Ethnic craftsmen take this opportunity to bring their products,

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882 broken by bursts of frenzied activity. This is utilized by the adults both to enculturate them and bend them to their will in "training" and "service", and to use the boundless physical energy of adolescents for considerable chores of physical labor.

The adolescents do not resent this most of the time, for they accept it as flattery and acknowledgement of their growing strength; enjoy the increased attention given them in the family as full-fledged, if subordinate members; appreciate the higher status that comes with advancing age, symbolized by the obedience they themselves can command at this stage from their younger siblings who follow them like retainers follow a feudal lord.

A. The Male Adolescent: Service and Young-Warrior.

882 561 The terms of address at this stage symbolize his position exactly, and are far more significant than in reference. Terms of address used in everyday life are: "ashkär" (lit. servant), to call a young man to duties ranging from running errands to doing most of the plowing. First used as flattery for boys of about 14, it becomes exactly descriptive and in everyday use as he matures to full stature power. When this happens, at about age 18, he may be flatteringly addressed as "gobäz", signifying "handsome young warrior". (footnote 79).

883 Duties at this stage, under supervision of the father or other male kinsman, include responsible and hard work in agriculture,

[[71]] Footnote 79: "gobäz" in Amharic has similar connotation to "bahurim" in Hebrew: the identification of the concept of young man with young warrior (Isaiah 31:8, Jeremiah 18:21, Amos 4:10). This is pointed out by Ullendorffe: The Obelisk of Matara, p. 31.

588 The "damoz" temporary wife is usually recruited from a lower class than that of the man, of landless family. But often she is merely a divorcee, who "lives alone" in a street inhabited by women of similar status in the town, who are in-between marriages, and make a living serving transients with bed and board, giving them the comforts of home, cooking, baking, cleaning. They are not considered good-time prostitutes of the mead-houses ("tej-byet"), and are therefore much more respected.

588 487 178 Respectably-married ("semanya") men would, in the past, take on a "damoz" wife to accompany them on caravan trips, to spare the "semanya" wife the discomforts and perils of the journey. Now that trucks travel comparatively fast from province to province, the travelling "damoz" wife has become rare, but the residential "damoz" wife continues in the towns much as before, and "semanya" wives are therefore not as tolerant of them as they once were when they appreciated their husbands' efforts to spare them discomfort. For, they reasoned, "who else will cook for him, how will he eat?".

588 848 The "damoz" wife's children are fully legitimate. She is far higher in status than the simple concubine ("yechen gared", lit. the servant-maid of the thigh), who was and is often a permanent member of the household, often of doubtful or half-Shanqalla ancestry, who has no damoz rights, and whose children have no rights of recognition beyond what the master cares to give them. (The concubine is also called "tara" or "tarata" in some districts).

588 171 The respectability or semi-respectability of the "damoz" wife compares to the Persian "ssighe", and the Arab Muslim temporary wife permitted in the Quran (IV:28 - "And in so far as you have derived pleasure from these women for a stipulated time, give them their

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588 rewards as agreed upon") practiced by the Shi'ites in particular.
171 (footnote 81). The Abyssinian Coptic "Fetha Nägäst" forbids concubinage; but the custom has long been widespread. "Damoz" is even recognized in the modern law of Emperor Haile Selassie.

551 Individual arrangements are freest in "damoz", also in "qurban"
585 though sometimes less so, and least in "semanya". But in all three forms of marriage, the wife retains her maiden name and does not assume that of her husband. Even Empress Menen continues her old name. Sometimes the husband's mother may try to symbolize her authority - or even affection - by giving a new name to her new daughter-in-law living in her hamlet, but the bride's kinfolk and
[602] peers will continue to use her old name. This is another, unconscious, emphasis of kinship relations over affinal ones.

588 The "damoz" is not considered contradictory to monogamy, which may explain her respectability despite prohibition of concubinage in the "Fetha Nägäst" code. Religious persons will explain the paradox away by quoting from Genesis "be fruitful and multiply".

583 In rural districts there is sometimes found a 4th form of
184 marriage, which indeed is re-enacted in some wedding ceremonies of "semanya". This form is bride capture, especially found among families too poor to defray the expenses of a wedding and cows that must be given the "semanya" couple. To cover up the shame and the poverty, the bride is "captured" and "pursued", by pre-arranged collusion. While she ostensibly goes, alone, to fetch water or gather deadwood, the groom's "mize" appear suddenly, preferably on horseback, and carry her off into the bush, while she, though ex-

Footnote 81: Donaldson, D.M.: Temporary Marriage in Iran. Moslem World, 1936, pp. 358-364. Smith, W. Robertson: Kinship and Marriage in early Arabia, 1885.

585 heavily veiled bride, unable to see through the heavy toga over her head and figure, is led to the center of the "dass" before the elders, to shouts of "ellel" by the women. For in rural areas it is still considered shameful to take the bride away in daylight. Her kinfolk say to her: "Say that so-and-so is your husband". She is expected to whisper it shyly, so that her words are repeated by witnesses that she, too, has taken the "Semanya" oath. This is greeted by "ellel" joyshout of the woman.

Next, the "mizē" are sworn in. The bride's father or elder say to the bridegroom: "Call for us two guarantors for her eyes, head and teeth". Whereupon the "mizē" step forward and take the oath.

Now the groom's party is invited to sit down, room is made for them, and beer and meat stew are passed to them.

The formal boasting, the "fukkara" dance and chant, is begun by the bride's kinsmen, then quickly taken up by the groom's kinsman. Each side recites feats of bravery, renown, warriors, holy priests, "great men" in the ancestry and kin of the side to which it belongs. Spears or firearms are brandished, held behind the neck, while epic battles are recited in poetic form and exaggeration. Each tries to surpass the other in this friendly contest, (footnote 83), but mock each other's deficiencies in composition of verses or recitation.

The groom affirms by oath that he will "do good and not evil" to his bride, that they will live together: "I, by my shield, she

[17] Footnote 83: Similar boasting contests are common in the Middle East.

3. Expressive Physical Arts.

531 Physical arts, like their material culture, are little developed among the Amhara, compared to their elaborate spiritual culture. If their life cycle gives any clue, it seems that the explanation lies at least in part in the end of free experimentation at the onset of adolescence, after which the experimentation is fettered into lines ordained by the Coptic church. Especially fine art, is considered exclusively within the domain of the church. This leaves little beyond body care and ornamentation for expression of physical arts, and even [302] this is partly dedicated to religion, such as the rationalized plucking of pubic hair of the woman, and the fullest expression of body arts on the occasion of church festivals.

●171 It is also interesting to observe how patterns of the Middle East and of Africa are so evidently drawn from and synthesized in the traditional Amhara pattern of expressive physical arts, particularly in body care and ornamentation.

A. Body Care and Ornamentation.

515 [312] Washing in the dry season is difficult, since water is scarce and there are no wells. However, with some little effort, water can even then be obtained by digging in the riverbed, since the water table is high; this is what travellers do. Near towns the latter effort develops into a business, for water carriers, employing women as cheap labor to carry the water in their clay pots uphill to the town, charge 5¢ [548] (Ethiopian) per potfull of water. Only the "unattached woman" who has a cash income from beer-brewing or temporary wife - prostitution, can afford this, and usually buys a potfull of this muddy water every day during the long dry season, to wash herself and her clothing regularly and frequently, at a time when the fully respectable Amhara housewife goes unwashed (except for hands and private parts). Divorcees looking for husbands and professional women alone feel the need for daily

887 preoccupied with the immediate demands of life. The culture pattern
812 encourages the shemagalye to give much time and effort to this wonderment, for it belongs to his prime role and social duty at this stage: the accumulation of wisdom. The church does not interfere with this wonderment and its expression, partly because it has not bothered to establish dogma on many subjects.

A. The Natural Universe.

821 In many ways the Amhara concept of the universe resembles that of
[[7]] early medieval Europe, plus understandable similarities to the Middle East and Africa. Some conceptualizations are elaborations from the Biblical universe, readily recognizable because almost always the Geez language is used to express them. Other conceptualizations are animistic, and usually employ Cushitic terminology.

The universe is regarded as a Ptolemaic system, with the earth as the fixed center around which the sun turns. A distinction is made between the physical world, called simply "arät mäzän" (lit. the 4 corners); and the world populated by all creatures, "aläm" (lit. world, in the Geez language). The persistence of this traditional view of a flat earth is so great that even Amhara schoolteachers in the modern elementary schools in the provinces, who are required to teach a spherical earth, privately admit that they don't believe it themselves!

Heavenly bodies and metereological phenomena are interpreted as directly related to human events. Venus is called "astärboshäsh" or "astäryo", (lit. the one who gives hunger and then flees), because the planet appears in the very brief dusk, when the heat of the day is over and one gets hungry. Because Venus is "fleeing and inconstant like a woman", she is given the feminine gender.

821 Considerable attention is given to the moon ("chäräqa"), for it
243 is believed to cause the ripening of the grain after the sun has

826 beauty: The comparative geromtomorphy of Amhara facial features, even in the case of females, is regarded by them as a mark of beauty, e.g. a long, high bridged nose, which denotes "nobility" and absence of strong negroid strains. In contrast, a flat nose with depressed root and broad nostril is called "kurfad", which is also used as an insult. The thick lips of the negroid Shanqalla ex-slaves ("känfäräm", lit. full lower lip), especially if at the same time everted ("ahewa länboch" lit. donkey lip; or "länbochäm") are considered marks of ugliness in both men and women. The rare light eyes that crop up among the Amhara are not regarded as special marks of beauty, but as [184] outlandish ("baher ayn", lit. eyes from overseas), for Amhara ethnocentrism is directed also at foreignisms other than negroid traits. [171] The bulging almond eyes popular in other parts of the Middle East are regarded as marks of feminine beauty and feminine "nobility" by the Amhara also.

The spiral peppercorn hair ("barya täsur", lit. slave hair; or "kordada"), of the subjected negroid races is regarded as ugly by the Amhara. Conversely, their own helical hair ("zgna täsur", i.e. hair that stands up thick and rich in a bushy halo, or thick curls) is considered beautiful and indicative of "good racial stock ("attentan"). Outcrops of soft, wavy hair ("lahucha", light hair that falls down), which is more frequent than light eyes, is regarded as outlandish, but accepted with a smile, as of no great significance.

Similar attitude rules the beauty of the ear. The medium-sized ear of most Amhara is preferred. The round, curved, small negroid ear ("coraf joro") is considered ugly; but the other extreme, the big elongated ear that stands out like a donkey's ("särbaba joro"), found

756 to have, books handed down from past centuries, containing secret formulae, recipes, pharmacopeia of an intermingled empirical and magical nature. They warn inquirers that the public revelation of th these secrets would create great social dangers at the hands of the irresponsible.

● 171 In the days of ancient Egypt, Abyssinia was a supplier of materials for embalming, such as incense, myrrh, etc. It is therefore little wonder that much of Abyssinian medicine resembles that of ancient Egypt, e.g. the strong emphasis on purgatives used regularly.

753 The Amhara shares with peasants in many other parts of the world his belief in "strong" medicine, powerful in taste or heroic in effect or both. Since the Italian invasion, his belief in injections, which bring such miraculously quick results, has assumed magical proportions. Generally he distrusts and fears new medicines.

1. Healing the Body

A. The Surgeon-Herbologist-Empiricist ("woggesha"): Utilizing Nature.

759 Unlike the other medical practioners mentioned earlier, the woggesha does not try to dominate nature; he specializes in utilising what nature provides and in lending a helping hand. He is most often the first consulted, a kind of general practitioner, family doctor; and since he refrains from magical undertakings, he is neither feared nor suspected of witchcraft, which the other practioners, even the dabtara, often are.

Like the dabtara, the woggesha is often an expert herbologist, called "<u>goabi seray</u>" (lit. who knows the work of nature). While walking in the bush, along brooks in the valley or in the "dega"

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"Arabic loanwords include:

Alla (h)	- master, God, heaven
Awleya	- (from Arabic "awliya", plural of waliy, saint), chief zars
Kafir	- Arabic term for the Christian Ethiopians
Qwaha	- coffee (from Arabic qahwa; Amharic uses "bunna"); coffee and perfume are taken over from Arabs, and are essential parts of the Zar ceremony.

Galla loanwords:

farda	- Galla for horse, here meaning slave possessed by a zar; "färäs", Amharic for horse, is taboo.
waqiyē yemmasgān	- Waq is Galla for "God", yemmasgan is Amharic for "be praised." Total means: thank you.

There are also Woyto loanwords.

It is natural that an argot of a professional language should borrow expressions from another language with which it comes in contact....The (zar) belief might have originated with the autochthonous population of Ethiopia - the Woyto probably belong to this population - and the Amhara might have taken it over from them together with some expressions....."

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One might add to these conclusions by Dr. Leslau that in recent years Arabic loanwords are increasingly being used in the zar argot, perhaps due to the improvement of trade routes to the Sudan. Also, the poet who must compose somewhat new poetry for special occasions in the zar cult, is the prime agent for the introduction of Arabic loanwords and usages such as addressing a powerful zake zar spirit as "Prophet" (in imitation of Muslim usage).

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Problems of the distribution of the "zar" and similar cults in Africa and the Middle East, such as questions as to the origin and the diffusion of the cult, are more difficult and complex.

Some linguists believe that the term "zar" is of Cushitic origin (Dr. Leslau, would seem to agree with this). This would antedate the

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Hadramauti (South Arabian) colonization of Abyssinia about 2500 years ago. According to this view, the term is derived from the supreme divinity of the "pagan" Cushites, the God-heaven called "Jar" (pronounced djar) in Agau, the old-Cushitic language of Western Ethiopia [104].

The term for the zar ceremony, "wädaja" (lit. love feast) evidently is derived from the Amharic stem "wäddädä" (lit. he loved; to love), unless one concludes that both Amhara and Galla peoples derive the concept from an ancient, common Cushitic origin, the opinion of Dr. Michel Leiris [105].

The bulk of evidence would indicate a "Cushitic" origin for the zar cult. Indeed, the distribution of it and closely related cults is found most intensely in the geographical areas in which Cushitic is spoken.

Among the Cushitic-speaking Galla tribes of southern Ethiopia, Dr. Cerulli [106] found a cult of worship of similar "nature-spirits", upon which the God of the conquering Abyssinians was placed later, and he infers that the same happened to the one-time sky-god of the Agau, pre-Semitic inhabitants of Cushitic-speaking northern Ethiopia. As a result, when northern Ethiopia became Christianized, the "zar", the former sky god, was demoted to a possessive spirit. Diffusion of the zar cult, Dr. Cerulli believes, was then carried by Abyssinian slaves into the Arab countries such as Egypt, the Hidjaz of Arabia and Oman, where the zar cult survives under its original name, "zar" or "sar".

104. Leslau: An Ethiopian Argot of a People Possessed by a Spirit; also Cerulli; "Zar" in Encyclopedia of Islam, 1933, p. 1217

105. Leiris, M: L'Afrique Fantôme. Paris 1934, pp. 336-7, 440.

106. Cerulli, E: Etiopia Occidentale, Vol 2, p. 35

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

X 794 Cerulli differentiates the "zar" cult from other beliefs in possession
● 171 by genies found, eg. in the "buri" cult of Nigeria and Tripolitania, and the "amok" of Malaya, which do not have the Abyssinian idea that the zar can be forced to go out of the body of the possessed through the performance of a special rite. [107]

Even earlier students of the zar cult among the Galla reported many phenomena identical to zar "worship" among the Amhara, as well as significant differences in detail. The Galla have a stronger element of worship in sacred groves than do the Amhara, who prefer the incense-filled hut as the center for public possession, diagnosis, treatment and social life. Emphasis on groves is also found in northern Ethiopia, among the Cushitic - speaking Qemants. Such grove worship venerates sycamore trees most often, but also junipers. Cotton thread, food, clothes and honey is offerred to them. Among the Ieju tribe of Galla, the Protestant missionaries Isenberg and Krapf observed the following in the mid-19th century:

> "They pay great respect to certain trees.... My people, desiring to sit down under its shadow, were immediately driven away, lest the Adbar should be angry (zar). Adbar means keeper or watchman. They grease this tree, and perform religious ceremonies under it. Nobody dare touch or damage the tree without risking a severe punishment....." [108]

The Galla of Harar province, in the 20th century, call their chief religious worship "wädaja" (the same term as the Amhara in the zar cult), described by the Catholic missionaries Azais and Chambard [109].

107. Cerulli, E.: Zar (in) Encyclopedia of Islam 1908, p. 1217

108. Isenberg, Krapf: Journals 1843, p. 439-440.

109. Azais & Chambard: 5 Années de Recherches Archéologiques en Etiopie. Paris, 1931, pp. 109-112.

X-114 ● 171 It is a family or communal prayer-gathering which is accompanied by a feast of bread or roasted coffee and corn, beer or hydromel, a portion of which is offerred to Waqa, the sky-god. Often a sheep is sacrificed. The term "wadaja" is also used by the Wollo and Raya tribes of Galla for their "Islamic evening prayer".

[114] The cult among Islamized Galla was witness by another observer:

> "The Muslim sorcerers have their own 'society'. If anyone wishes to obtain a favor or draw down a curse upon his enemies, he invites several old men of the village, buys them Kat (note: the drugleaf chat, or qat) and passes the whole night with them singing, praying and cursing if it is an enemy, or blessing if it is a question of benediction. This is called making wädaja. The interested party seats himself in the middle of the kabiras who spit kat on his head, crying "yakkum" - "may it be fulfilled." (Note: compare with "yehun" of Amhara). In general, the wädaja lasts the whole night"..... 110

Southeast of Galla territory, among the Somali people, Dr. Cerulli observed "ceremonies intended to procure the incarnation of the genius to force the evil spirit to enter the bodies of initiated persons" 111

In the eastern lowland of Ethiopia, among the Afar people (also called Danakil), Dr. Thesiger observed the following:

[114] "The 'Afar Asa Mara, who unlike the Somali do not have a wide range of dances, perform an oracle dance called the jenile. The jenile, who may be man or woman, is an ordinary member of the community who is able to fall into a trance and deliver oracles. For its performance the men form a close circle and chant and clap their hands until the jenile, who is seated nearby covered with a shamma, enters the circle. Then the dancers, without moving their feet, bend forward chanting faster and faster until the jenile in a trance answers their questions....."

> "The southern Afar localize a spirit on Mount Ayelu, an isolated volcano in the south of Afar land dominating Badhu. On its summit is a rectangular walled enclosure which they visit on pilgrimage after the rains, sacrificing sheep, and pray for the fertility of their animals and success in war...." 112

110. Zervos A: L'Empire d'Ethiopie. 1935. p. 93
111. Cerulli, E: Etiopia Occidentale, Vol. 2 p.35
112. Thesiger, W.G: The Awash River and the Aussa Sultanate. Geographical Journal. Vol. 85, 1935. p. 8.

X 794 171 The same observer reports that the silver baton of the former Sultan of Aussa in this area was regarded as a magical object, enshrined, and confided to enboys on special missions. (Note Ber Alanga on zar list of Amhara).

X 794 177 171 Diffusion of the zar cult from these areas to neighboring lands is the general consensus of most scholars who have occupied themselves with the problem. This would center the origin of the zar cult in Ethiopia. The name itself was noted among the Islamized Somali by Cerulli:

[illegible]

> "As a remainder of paganism may be regarded the ceremony of the sar, perhaps an ancient sacred dance. Natives crown in a circle and the chorus begins to sing on a special rythm. One or many among the singers fall fainting away to the ground. The others "beat the sar" by singing and striking the hands or clattering with the feet or striking drums or kettle drums. Then the person who has fainted rises little by little from the ground, takes in his hands a dagger, and dances in the circle with the dagger drawn out, til he falls again in a faint; but immediately rises fully recovered, The sar is danced also with a burning brand instead of the dagger; among the Sab the dancer goes out of the circle, runs in the jungle nearby and then comes back showing with loud cries his dagger sprinkled with blood of the genius he has killed..." 113

X 794 171 Diffusion of the zar cult into the Sudan from Abyssinia is concluded by Trimmingham in his recent book "Islam in the Sudan".

114 What seems to be a form of the zar cult was observed among the Swahili of coastal East Africa, where it was called "Ngoma ya Pepo", according to Skene. 114

In predominantly Islamic areas, it seems that the zar is classified as an evil spirit, similar to the jinn. This is the how orthodox Muslims are enjoined to regard all pre-Islamic "pagan" deities, according to the Quran, (Sura 37, verse 158).

113. Cerulli: Somali, Engyclop. of Islam 1908, p. 487
114. Skene: Arab and Swahili Dances. Journal of the Royal Anthrop. Instit., 1917, pp. 420-434.

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

X 794
171
114

In the Hidjaz, the zar cult was observed by the scholar Hurgronje. He noted that it was especially widely diffused among women of Mecca and other towns, the same pattern as in Egypt. The woman chief who conducted the ceremonies held the title "shekha", and attempted to ascertain the nationality of the zar by questioning him either in "vulgar Arabic" or in "zar language" known only to initiated persons.[115] (Note the close similarity to the female doctor - dominated zar cult, and similar procedure of diagnosis and zar language as among the Amhara!).

In the Oman, Cerulli believes the zar arrived carried by slaves imported from Ethiopia. There the spirit is referred to in the plural, "ziran".[116]

In Egypt, many observers in the 19th century and up to the present time have reported zar ceremonies. Kahle, observing it there almost half a century ago, concluded that the cult had arrived in Egypt, by distribution from Abyssinia, for the following reasons:

(1) Because the Amharic name "zar" had carried over;

(2) because of the exorcistic character of some of the ceremonies;

(3) because of the history of its spread in the 19th century when contact between Abyssinia and Egypt became much closer;

(4) because the ceremonies are conducted by a woman.

He reported that this woman was called "sheikha" or "'arifa alsikka", and that she treated each spirit differently according to his place of origin, sometimes from Upper Egypt, sometimes from Lower Egypt, the Sudan, etc. In this differentiated treatment she was careful to use

115. Hourgronje, S: Mekka. 1889, Vol. 2, p. 124-8
116. Cerulli: Zar. Encyclopedia of Islam, 1908, p. 1218

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

X 744 ● 171 114

the proper melody, song, individual clothing required by the zar. The chants were accompanied by small drums and by dances. A sacrifice of fowl was usually offerred. The ceremonies lasted sometimes many nights in succession. [117]

In 1890, pamplets condemning the zar cult were printed in Cairo. They complained that the ceremonies "speculate on the ignorance and stupidity of the women of Cairo"; "the dangerous spreading of this lucrative swindle and the concern this is causing noble-minded and intelligent menfolk". Letters were cited that had been written to the editors of Cairo newspapers, quoting the Quran in protest against the zar cult, and stating that the zar cult "celebrates his triumphs especially in the houses of the richest, socially most prominent Turkish families residing in Cairo". One modern-educated, sophisticated and worried Egyptian even sent his wife to a zar ceremony to study the details of it, at the suggestion of a German scholar named Vollers, who then published a brief description in the original Arabic. In the cult, the term "zinzar" was used to indicate a woman posessed by the zar, and the term was increasingly used for epileptic attacks, the sufferers of which were being taken to the zar ceremonies. [118]

It would be interesting to make a study of the influence of the zar cult on Islamic societies, perhaps along the lines indicated in Zwemer's "Influence of Animism on Islam" [119]. Such a study would be obverse to Joseph Greenberg's "Influence of Islam on a SudaneseReligion". [120]

117. Kahle, Paul: Zar Beschwörungen in Egypten. Der Islam, III, 1912, p. 1-41, 189-190.
118. Littman, Enno: Arabische Geisterbeschwörungen Aus Egypten (Zar). Leipzig, 1950.
Vollers, Karl: Noch einmal der Zar. Zeitschrift Deutsch. Morgenl. Ges, 45, Leipzig, 1891, pp. 343-351
Walker, J: Folk Medicine in Modern Egypt. London 1934, p. 64-7
119. Zwemer, S.M.: The Influence of Animism on Islam. 1920.
120. Greenberg, J.: Influence of Islam on a Sudanese Religion. New York, 1947

754 B. Evil-Eye Sickness ("Buda") and its Healing.
776

Even "zar" spirits are considered vulnerable to the evil-eye sickness, the most feared of all ailments. The human patient must either be cured or will die. The evil spirits, collectively named "buda" - though that name is taboo - are never benign, and must be exorcised. Buda possessions are less common than "zar". The most common method of the evil-eye buda is to "drink the blood" of his victim, magically, so that he will slowly waste away. The buda spirit does this by draining the victim through the magic power of the evil eye.

a) Basic Concepts of "buda".

"Buda" is the personification of the evil eye, a concept that includes the evil spirit itself; the sorcerer, regarded as most commonly a male member of the professional, ethnic ironsmith caste passing on the power of the evil eye from generation to generation; and the "magical hyena" which serves the sorcerer as his favorite "horse", but into which he can also change himself at night. The hyena is, of course, the most typical and most active night-animal, and its habit of digging into fresh graves to consume the corpses, which can be observed almost daily, seems to confirm the connection in the Amhara mind.

● [17] The foreign observer is reminded of the similarity to the werewolf concept of mediæval Europe, which was also regarded as personified in some ethnic minority; and the common evil-eye concept still casting fear all over the Middle East. [121]

121. Eisler, R.: Man into Wolf. London 1951
Jaussen, J.A.: Le Mauvais Oeil. Revue Biblique, 33, Paris 1924, pp. 396-407

578 In the new courts established by the central government in
689 the provincial towns, the term "kayla" is regarded as an insult and can be prosecuted legally. The proper, legal term is "seratanna" (lit. workman).

326 How can one explain this strong syndrome: ironsmith - buda -
754 Falasha, which still dominates the Amhara mind? It is interesting
563 that silversmiths are less feared than ironsmiths, are more respected and (perhaps in psychological consequence) are regarded as less hateful and vengeful; (they are also less feared for they work indoors, where they can "see" less). Furthermore, although Falashas in their own society are not ashamed of their ironsmith trade, the Amhara project their own despising of this manual craft onto the Falashas and believe that Falasha ironsmiths, ashamed to be seen working at such lowly work, "fasten" on passersby with their buda eyes.

Perhaps at the basis of this syndrome lies the idea that a skilled craft, existing within the technologically primitive Amhara society, must be the result of association with evil forces
● [[71]] of the supernatural. This has been the pattern regarding ironsmiths in parts of the Middle East, Africa and ancient Europe. Among the Amhara Copts of Abyssinia, the idea that these ironsmiths are also "deniers of Jesus Christ", yet have an "education" of their own, above the "pagans" makes them doubly dangerous. Added to this is a projection of their own pattern of fears and hates.

a. "Buda" doctors past and present

756 While the aforementioned dabtara is the most commonly
793 called doctor of buda disease, sometimes, especially in urban areas, the Coptic priest himself is called in.

776 Foreign observers, citing early European parallels, have often
174 wondered whether the Christian Church of Abyssinia has replaced the
797 pre-Christian spirits with angels and saints, denoting the pre-Christian spirits to demons. Except for the "ganyen"- where this attempt is still far from successful - only one foreign scholar has traced such a replacement, in Abyssinia. While studying the celebrations of the Birth of the Holy Virgin in Abyssinia, he noticed certain features which led him to think that his holiday is used to obliterate an old "pagan" cult of outdoor spirits. [127]

Thus the predominant factor is still one of syncretism.

756 E. The Characteristic Significance of Amhara Healing of the Spirit.

The Abyssinian practitioner of magic is first and predominantly a healer (with the minor exception of the despised täṅqway sorcerer). He is a healer of individual patients, rather than of society.

171 [182] Thus the social significance is at most secondary. The only exception, the "zar society", is primarily "group therapy". There is only tangential contact with political, legal, administrative institutions and their function. This is very different from the "society of sorcerers" among the Bemba of Northeast Rhodesia, who hold the people in terror and exercise political power. [128]

[794 562] While the "zar societies" are female-dominated in quantity of members and in leadership, males are by no means excluded. They therefore differ considerably from the "female witches society" among the Kupe of Northern Nigeria. [129]

171 754 The only close parallel between Amhara concepts of magic and other African concepts of magic is between the "buda" complex of the

127. Tubiana, J: Un Culte des Génies Agreste en Ethiopia". Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, Vol. XIII, pp. 76-90. December 1954
128. Richards, A.I.: A Modern Movement of Witchfinders. Africa, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1935
129. Nadel, S.F.: Witchcraft and Anti-Witchcraft in Kupe Society. ibid

171/754 Amhara, and evil witchcraft feared by the geographically close Nilotic Azande. This is not surprising, since contact with the "Barya" people of the Nilotic Sudan is well known. In Azande society, persons who are "socially undesirable" are suspected of sorcery, but never the nobles and the rich.[130] Among the Amhara, too, [554] no "telleq sew" (great man, noble, rich) is likely to be accused as a "buda" sorcerer, while socially low-class groups doing the despised work of ironsmithing are immediately suspected when a "buda" case arises. In both societies, Azande and Amhara, such suspicion leads to prompt interrogation of the suspect, and revenge by the kinfolk of the victim. In this type of magic, social significance, i.e. ethnic relations in Amhara territory, is considerable.

177/755 Amhara healing of the spirit is psychological, in the first place of significance. In the second place of significance is the enormous syncretism, among linguistic, ethnic, religious and racial components of the art of healing. It presents one of the few outlets for "free enterprise" available in the Amhara tradition. It is this cultural syncretism over the centuries, which, despite the political isolation of Abyssinia, has maintained and developed the spirited character of the Amhara peasant.

130. Evans-Pritchard, E.E.: Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande. London 1937.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

of those departed, which would be vain did they believe they were already in the presence of God, and in possession of the greatest bliss possible, wanting nothing to complete it. "Remember," says their liturgy, "O Lord! the souls of thy servants, our father Abba Matthias, and the rest of our saints, Abba Salama, and Abba Jacob." In another place, "Remember, O Lord! the kings of Ethiopia, Abreha, and Atzbeha, Caleb, and Guebra Mascal." And again, "Release, O, Lord! our father Antonius, and Abba Macarius." If this is not directly acknowledging a separate state, it can have no meaning at all.

I have already said, that the Agaazi, the predecessors of those people that settled in Tigre from the mountains of the Habab, were shepherds adjoining to the Red Sea; that they speak the language Geez, and are the only people in Abyssinia in possession of letters; that these are all circumcised, both men and women. The former term, as applied to men, is commonly known to every one the least acquainted with the Jewish history. The latter is, as far as I know, a rite merely Gentile; although in Africa, at least that part adjoining to Egypt and the Red Sea, it is much more known and more universally practised than the other. This I shall call *excision*, that I may express this uncommon operation by as decent a word as possible. The Falasha likewise submit to both.

These nations, however they agree in their rite, differ in their accounts of the time they received this ceremony, as well as the manner of performing it. The Abyssinians of Tigre say, that they received it from Ishmael's family and his descendants, with whom they were early connected in their trading voyages. They say also, that the queen of Saba, and all the women of that coast, had suffered excision at the usual time of life, before puberty, and before her journey to Je-

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

rusalem. The Falasha again declare, that their circumcision was that commonly practised at Jerusalem in the time of Solomon, and in use among them when they left Palestine, and came into Abyssinia. 304 171

The circumcision of the Abyssinians is performed with a sharp knife, or razor. There is no laceration with the nails, no formula or repetition of words, nor any religious ceremony at the time of the operation, nor is it done at any particular age, and generally it is a woman that is the surgeon. The Falasha say, they perform it sometimes with the edge of a sharp stone; sometimes with a knife or razor, and at other times with the nails of their fingers; and for this purpose they have the nails of their little fingers of an immoderate length. At the time of the operation, the priest chants a hymn, or verse, importing, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hast ordained circumcision!" This is performed on the eighth day, and is a religious rite, according to the first institution by God to Abraham.

The Abyssinians pretend theirs is not so; and, being pressed for the reason, they tell you it is because Christ and the apostles were circumcised, though they do not hold it necessary to salvation. But it is the objection they constantly make against eating out of the same plate, or drinking out of the same cup, with strangers, that they are uncircumcised; while, with the Egyptians or the Cophts, though equally strangers, they make no such difficulty. In the time of the Jesuits, when the Roman Catholic religion was abolished, and liberty given them to return to their old worship, their priests proclaimed a general circumcision; and the populace, in the first days of their fury, or triumph, murdered many Catholics, by stabbing them with a lance in that part, as they met them, repeating, in derision, the Jewish hymn, or ejacula- 304 609

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

304 the countenance of Azarias, the son of Zadok, the high priest, and the representatives of the twelve tribes who came with him at that time from Jerusalem.

304 171 It seems to me very extraordinary, that, if circumcision was originally a Jewish invention, all those nations to the south should be absolutely ignorant of it, while others to the northward were so early acquainted with it; for none of those nations upon the Nile (excepting the Shepherds), either know or practise it to this day; though, ever since the 1400th year before Christ, they have been in the closest connection with the Jews. This would rather make me believe, that the rite of circumcision went northward from the plain of Mamre; for it certainly made no progress southward from Egypt. We see it obtained in Arabia, by Zipporah *, Moses's wife, circumcising her son upon their return to Egypt. Her great anxiety to have that operation immediately performed, shews that her's was a Judaical circumcision; there was no sin that attended the omission of this operation in Egypt; but God had said to Abraham †, "The soul that is not circumcised shall be cut off from Israel."

The Tcheratz Agows, who live between Lasta and Begemder, in an exceedingly fertile country, are not circumcised; and, therefore, if this nation left Palestine upon Joshua passing Jordan, circumcision was not known there; for the Agows, to this day, are uncircumcised. The same may be said of the Agows of Damot, who are settled at the head of the Nile. It will be seen by the two specimens of their different languages, that they are different nations, as I have alleged. Next to these are the Gafat, in a plain open country, who do not use circumcision; none of them

* Exod. chap. iv. ver. 25.
† Gen. chap. xvii. ver. 14.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

were ever converted to Judaism, and but few of them to Christianity. The next are the people of Amhara, who did not use circumcision, at least few of them, till after the massacre of the princes by Judith, in the year 900, when the remaining princes of the line of Solomon fled to Shoa, and the court was established there. The last of these nations that I shall mention are the Galla, who are not circumcised; of this nation we have said enough.

On the north, a black, woolly-headed nation, called the Shangalla, already often mentioned, bounds Abyssinia, and serves like a string to the bow made by these nations of the Galla. Who they are we know perfectly, being the Cushite Troglodytes of Sofala, Saba, Axum, and Meroe; shut up, as I have already mentioned, in those caves, the first habitations of their more polished ancestors. Neither do these circumcise, though they immediately bordered upon Egypt; while the Cushite, adjoining to the peninsula of Africa, certainly did. As, then, so many nations contiguous to Egypt never received circumcision from it, it seems an invincible argument, that this was no endemial rite or custom among the Egyptians, and, I have before observed, that it was of no use to this nation; as the reasons mentioned by Philo, and the rest, of cleanliness and climate, are absolute dreams, and now exploded; and that they are so is plain, because, otherwise, the nations more to the southward would have adopted it, as they have universally done another custom, which I shall presently speak of.

Circumcision, then, having no natural cause or advantage, being in itself repugnant to man's nature, and extremely painful, if not dangerous, it could never originate in man's mind wantonly and out of free-will. It might have done so indeed from imitation; but with Abraham it had a cause, as God was to make his

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
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304 private family in a few years numerous like the sand
of the sea. This mark, which separated them from
171 all the world, was an easy way to shew whether the
promise was fulfilled or not. They were going to
take possession of a land where circumcision was not
known; and this shewed them their enemy distinct
from their own people. And it would be the grossest
absurdity to send Samson to bring, as tokens of the
slain, so many foreskins, or prepuces, of the Philis-
tines, if, as Herodotus says, the Philistines had cut off
their prepuces a thousand years before.

304 I must here take notice, that this custom, filthy and
barbarous as it is, has been adopted by the Abyssi-
nians of Tigre, who have always been circumcised,
from a knowledge that the nations about them were
not circumcised at all. It is true they do not content
themselves with the foreskin, and I doubt very much
if this was not the case with the Jews likewise. On
the contrary, in place of the foreskin, they cut the
whole away, scrotum and all, and bring this to their
superiors, as a token they have killed an enemy.

Although it then appears, that the nations which
had Egypt between Abraham and them, that is, were
to the southward, did not follow the Egyptians in the
rite of circumcision; yet in another, that of excision,
they all concurred. Strabo * says, the Egyptians cir-
cumcised both men and women, like the Jews. I will
not pretend to say that any such operation ever did
obtain among the Jewish women, as Scripture is silent
upon it; and, indeed, it is nowhere ever pretended to
have been a religious rite, but to be introduced from
necessity, to avoid a deformity which nature has sub-

* Lib. xvii. p. 953.

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

tent secluded and when they go out they ride mules astride, are completely veiled or rather covered up in their *chammas* and are accompanied by an escort on foot, one or two of whom walk or trot by the side of the mule holding the lady in position.

Getting on to the mule is an operation that must by no means be witnessed by the profane masculine eye; I remember on the occasion of the first visit paid to my wife by an Abyssinian lady of rank I went to the entrance to speed the parting guest. To my surprise a number of members of the escort took off their *chammas* and held them all round the mule so that their mistress could climb into her saddle in complete seclusion.

But rigid as may be the rules of privacy governing the lives of women, there are no harems, and no guard of eunuchs to watch over them as in Moslem countries.

Nevertheless other Eastern customs are practised, such as circumcision among men and a mild form of clitoridectomy among women; this custom, be it observed, is not as is often supposed of Jewish origin, but probably of much more remote antiquity, and is further evidence of the Hamitic descent of the Abyssinians; according to Gibbon circumcision had been practised "by the most ancient Ethiopians, from motives of health and cleanliness" and presumably not therefore as a religious rite.

The nation as a whole has not adopted European dress, although it is worn to some extent in Addis Ababa, and by individuals who have been to Europe. They are proud of their national dress and the Emperor still encourages its use at court functions and receptions at the palace.

The distinctive feature of the dress is the *chamma*,

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5
Ethiopia MP1
Tigre MN9

related to Ge'ez, the ancient and liturgical language of Ethiopia, much as Italian is related to Latin.[1] It was in Tigre country that, during the first seven centuries A.D., the kingdom of Aksum reached heights of civilization never again attained in Ethiopia's history. Because of the antiquity of their region and the glory of their past, the Tigre are to some extent the cultural aristocrats of Ethiopia.

The Amhara inhabit vast areas of what are today the provinces of Begemder, Gojjam, Wallo, and Shoa. Their language, Amharic, is the official language of Ethiopia.* Since the beginning of what is called the restored Solomonid Dynasty (1270), all but one of the emperors of Ethiopia have been Amhara.† The exception was a Tigre, Emperor Yohānnes IV (1872–89), though he sojourned for many years at Dabra Tābor in Amhara country, and Amharic was commonly spoken at his court.

The differences between Amhara and Tigre culture have not yet been studied systematically. Even so, one can say that their differences are not nearly so great as what the two groups have in common. Language forms the chief difference. Like Ge'ez and Tigrinya, Amharic is a Semitic language, ultimately descended from old South Arabic, but Amharic has been molded to a greater degree by indigenous Cushitic tongues. Other differences relate to minor variations in custom, greater communal orientation in some Tigre areas, and differences in temperament. But the two groups share the legacy of Aksum, the Ethiopic alphabet, Ge'ez literature, Monophysite Christianity, similar political and social institutions, and the same style of life. One would be justified in treating their traditional Abyssinian culture as a unity, as virtually all authors have done in the past.

In this book, however, I have chosen to focus on Amhara culture as the dominant tradition in Ethiopia. This has been done, first of all, because of my limited competence to deal with Tigre materials, since I am neither familiar with Tigrinya nor fortunate enough to have done field work in Tigre areas. But a less fortuitous reason is that any serious account of contemporary Ethiopia must begin with the fact of Amhara dominance. With respect to numbers, true, the Amhara are in a minority: Amhara probably comprise no more than one-quarter of Ethiopia's total population (now estimated at around twenty-two million). Their dominance is to be measured, rather, in political and cultural terms. On the political side it is manifest in the perpetuation of the Amhara monarchy and the preponderance of Amhara in top political offices. On the cultural side it appears in the spread of Amhara customs throughout the empire by officials, soldiers, settlers, and teachers, and in

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* English is the second official language.

† A number of Amhara emperors since the mid-eighteenth century were partly of Galla stock, however.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Amhara invention. Though exact documentation is not available on the matter, *qenē* appears to be one of the flowers of the literary renascence which took place during the centuries following the ascendance of the Solomonid Dynasty. The earliest specimens of *qenē* extant date back to the reign of Emperor Eskender (1478–94).[6] Ethiopian traditions trace the invention of *qenē* to the work of a man named Tawānay, who is said to have lived in Gojjam in the fourteenth century.[7] The important schools of *qenē* have always been located in Amhara country, primarily at the monasteries of Wādelā, Wāsharā, and Gonj in Gojjam Province. While the choristers of Tigre have long since mastered the canons of *qenē* composition in Ge'ez, the use of wax and gold in the vernacular occurs much more often in Amharic than in Tigrinya. Indeed, wax and gold is so important in Amharic that some Amhara maintain that one does not properly speak the language unless he is well versed in the art of exploiting its numerous ambiguities. One of the more common indictments of Tigre character by Amhara is that the Tigre are "dry" (*daraq*); they say just what they feel and do not know how to be ambiguous. Conversely, many Tigre as well as other non-Amhara people in the empire complain about the excess of symbolism and subtlety in Amhara discourse.

Educated Amhara traditionalists extol wax and gold as a unique creation of their culture. One of them has written that *qenē* is as distinctive of Ethiopia's spiritual culture as *tēff*, a species of grass grown as a cereal grain only in Ethiopia, is distinctive of her material culture.[8] They further maintain that Ge'ez *qenē* contains a unique kind of wisdom, dark and deep. Instruction in this occult art of verse composition has traditionally been regarded as propaedeutic to the study of religious texts.* Partly this is because Ge'ez grammar, which must be known in order to understand these texts, is normally taught only in the schools of *qenē*. The more philosophical reason given, however, is that by affording exercise in fathoming secrets it "opens the mind" and thereby enhances the student's ability to approach the divine mysteries.

Important as such functions may be in the high culture of Ethiopia, wax and gold represents more than a principle of poetic composition and a method of spiritual gymnastics for a small class of literati. The ambiguity symbolized by the formula *sam-ennā warq* colors the entire fabric of traditional Amhara life. It patterns the speech and outlook of every Amhara. When he talks, his

* The course of instruction in *qenē* takes from two to five years, according to the talent of the student and the degree of mastery he desires. Ge'ez grammar and *qenē* prosody are taught side by side. The former, usually studied in the evening, is learned by rote. The latter is taught by running the student step by step through the gamut of figures and stanza forms. Instruction by example begins in the dark, before sunrise. The teacher extemporizes on a given theme in each of the stanza forms. His productions are memorized and discussed. In the daytime each student goes off by himself to a secluded place and composes one stanza. When finished—it may take him all day to perfect a couplet—he recites it to the master, who makes appropriate critical comments.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*883 829 ful," and "loud-mouthed." England is liked because it is "highly civilized" and has a "good form of government"; but it is disesteemed because of its waning power, on the one hand, and its "cunning" and "treachery," and being imperialist, on the other. Russia is admired because of its power, its achievements in science, and its rapid attainment of "civilization." It is disliked, on the other hand, for being "aggressive" and "fostering war," and because of its "bad form of government" and its "atheism."

*883 829 721 191

TABLE 12

ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS FROM ETHIOPIA AND SEVEN OTHER COUNTRIES TOWARD WAR*

Country	Institution	Sex	War Is			Number
			Needless and Preventable (per cent)	A Necessary Evil (per cent)	Sometimes a Good Thing (per cent)	
Ethiopia	Secondary schools	M	46	11	43	(392)
	Secondary schools	F	46	18	36	(39)
	Colleges	M	45	20	35	(199)
Egypt	Higher Training College	M	31	34	34	(29)
	Women Teachers' Institute	F	39	35	26	(31)
France	University of Bordeaux	M	65	26	9	(105)
		F	74	26	0	(23)
Italy	Catholic University of the Sacred Heart	M	61	26	13	(39)
		F	46	44	10	(37)
Japan	Secondary school and colleges, Kyoto	M	72	16	8	(95)
		F	58	37	4	(119)
Mexico	National University of Mexico	M	51	23	26	(106)
		F	58	24	18	(103)
New Zealand	Victoria University College	M	72	16	12	(74)
		F	72	12	16	(51)
United States	Miami University	M	69	22	9	(112)
		F	64	33	3	(91)

* The Japanese data appear in Stoetzel, *op. cit.*, p. 306.
For the data on the other countries I am greatly indebted to a personal communication from Professor James Gillespie.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

own right. Indeed, the record of rebellions by nobility as well as clergy against the emperors of Ethiopia bespeaks a persisting dualism in the Abyssinian's disposition toward the monarchy itself. In principle, the emperor is reverenced. Widely held is the sentiment expressed in the *Kebra Nagast:* "It is not a good thing for any of those who are under the dominion of a king to revile him, for retribution belongeth to God."[16] But unquestioning deference is by no means necessarily coupled with unswerving loyalty. The Abyssinian pattern differs from the Japanese, in which total loyalty to the divine monarch calls for suicide in the wake of any disgrace one might have brought upon him. The norms of fealty to the emperor have not been so deeply internalized in Ethiopia, where the pardon and reinstatement of rebels has been a common occurrence. Among Abyssinians a veneer of genuine deference has often concealed an inner consciousness of disaffection, enabling the individual to act out rebellious wishes when the opportunity or need arises. Indeed, this ambivalence has been one of the traditional impulses behind the culture pattern of wax and gold.

The Old Nobility

The Abyssinians themselves acknowledge the existence of, in addition to the emperor, two groups of persons with pre-eminent status. These are called, both in Ge'ez and Amharic, the *makuännent,* or "nobility," and the *kähenät,* or "clergy." While believing the presence of a king to be a precondition of civil order, they also regard the presence of these other elites as necessary for their good life. This attitude is expressed in the Amharic saying: "Fertility of the land [is] through the *makuännent;* the splendor of the church [is] through the *kähenät.*"[17]

The term *makuännent* may be used to refer to all secular dignitaries between the emperor and the well-to-do landowning peasantry. In strict contemporary usage, however, the *makuännent* should be distinguished from two other classes of personages, whom we may call the "royal nobility" and the "local nobility" or "gentry." The former consists of the immediate royal family (*negusäwi bétasab*) and more distant royal relatives (*masäfent*). Because of their kinship with the Solomonic line these have at times been referred to as "chiefs of Israel."[18] Although it was customary for each new king to exile all male relatives who were potential candidates for the Crown to a high mountain fortress, more distant relatives might hold provincial governorates, and women of the royal family sometimes played an important role in court politics and provincial administration. Members of the royal nobility have normally been distinguished by special titles: *äbéto* (now vulgarized as *äto,* "Mister"), *le'ul,* and *lïjj* for men; and *emebét, le'elt,* and *wayzaro* (now vulgarized in the sense of "Mrs.") for women.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

565 554 Barradas: "Father, these villeins are like camels, they cry and groan when they are loaded, but in the end they carry the load that is put on them."[34] They set themselves off from the commoners, not only because of their style of life and subculture, but also because they came from well-known families.

Such sentiments were shared by the commoners. They would much rather be governed by a man from a noted family than by a person promoted from their own social level. The folkways expressed a disdain for the *nouvel arrivé*, 565 554 644 for example, by poking fun at the office of *liqa maḳuās* (the king's double in time of battle). The *liqa maḳuās* was often a man from an unknown family, chosen because of his handsome features and resemblance to the king. The office permitted him to strut about in the king's clothes and inclined him to assume haughty airs. In some places it was customary to ridicule this upstart by referring to the minstrel, or *azmāri*, as *liqa maḳuās;* for the *azmāri*, too, was entitled to wear the kind of dress appropriate to the lord in whose banquet hall he performed, but the *azmāri* was a person of low prestige in Abyssinian society.

643 565 554 In other words: although the emperors could appoint and depose whenever they pleased, with or without cause; and though "the land and persons of their subjects are equally their property, and every inhabitant of their kingdom is born their slave"; by itself the principle of royal favor is clearly inadequate to explain the Abyssinian pattern of social stratification. For, unlike the [171] neighboring kingdom of Buganda, Abyssinia was not a straightforward despotism in which the dispensation of a *kabaḳa* was sufficient to elevate a man into the highest social stratum.[35] The claims of a quasi-hereditary noble status group have also had to be satisfied.

565 How did this status group arise, and how have its claims been expressed and justified? What has been the history of its relationship with the monarchy? The existence of this class is anchored in the actual tendency for lands, [423] [631] [554] office, and titles to be given to members of the same families. In reality, the emperors frequently let such possessions pass from father to son, either because they were in too distant a region or because there was no good cause for taking them away, and on occasion drew up written charters assigning grants [423] of land to a man and his future descendants.[36] Indeed, one form of land [631] tenure, known as *rĭsta-gult*, was precisely a sort of hereditary fief, given in exchange for military service over the generations. In certain areas, moreover, [554] it was a matter of tradition that the governorship be given to members of a [428] certain family. Finally, although no man inherited a title, as son of a nobleman he might inherit the culture and facilities that would give him a much better chance than any commoner to obtain a title of his own.

Two other aspects of Abyssinian society supported this tendency toward [554] the development of what amounted to local dynasties of nobility. One was the prestige attached to the "chiefs of Israel," any of the nobility who could

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

THE PHENOMENA OF AMHARA ORALITY

Shortly after an Amhara child is born some butter is placed in his mouth. This is done in the belief that it will keep his voice from becoming harsh. From that moment on, the mouth never ceases to be an organ of extraordinary importance in his life. Its cultural importance is reflected in the attention given to it in the Amharic vocabulary: Baeteman's *Dictionnaire Amarigna-Français* lists some sixty idioms built with the Amharic word for mouth, *af*, more than are listed for any other words in the language except "eye," "heart," and "earth."[4] The organ is publicly celebrated in such proverbs as: "Cleverness of mouth, to the master; cleverness of hand, to the slave."

The oral zone is of course of universal significance. Some items of oral imagery probably appear in most languages, and manifestations of oral libido appear in many forms familiar to Westerners: the French love for gourmandism, the German passion for beer-drinking and singing, the American addiction to cigarettes, chewing gum, and "life-savers." Many of the less familiar phenomena to be related below in describing Amhara orality, moreover, are found in most of the cultures of Africa and the Middle East. But such phenomena often appear inconspicuously alongside other culturally patterned impulses and sublimations stemming from other phases of psychosexual development. What may distinguish the Amhara—and doubtless some other cultures—is the extent to which the oral zone is an object of attention and a source of behavioral modes and expressive symbolism. The Amhara, it appears, have a preoccupation with orality.

This preoccupation is manifest in three different kinds of phenomena. There are, first of all, aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong positive attachment to the infantile experience of sucking, in pure and in numerous sublimated forms. These we shall designate as the phenomena of *oral erotism*. Second, there are the aspects of Amhara culture which express a strong positive attachment to the oral zone as a center for various aggressive activities—the modes which Erikson calls "incorporation by biting," "oral retention," and "oral intrusion." These we shall collectively designate as the phenomena of *oral sadism*. Finally, there are phenomena which express a conflict about the gratification of many of these oral desires; and these we shall refer to as the phenomena of *oral ambivalence*.

Oral Erotism

Feeding at the breast is a prominent and beloved experience in Amhara life. The Amhara infant is suckled whenever he wishes, at the slightest show of desire. Since he is rarely separated from his mother it is easy for him to satisfy himself at any time of day or night. Popular beliefs about breast-feed-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Spontaneous co-operation is most in evidence among the Amhara at times of crisis. When death is announced, relatives and friends promptly repair to the home of the deceased and offer their help. They build the coffin and construct a *däss* (a temporary shelter near the house to accommodate all the expected visitors). They bring food and drink to help provide for the many who will come to pay their respects, and will similarly provide help on the occasion of the big memorial feasts to follow. Like assistance is rendered during other crises, such as prolonged illnesses or fire. Such forms of co-operation set another significant limit to egoistic orientation among the Amhara.

It is in the realm of interaction involving serious interests, touching layers of the personality deeper than those required for the formalities of etiquette, that Amhara egoism is most conspicuous. Here everything seems to conspire against generous communication and concord of opinion. As we have already observed, the Amhara are quick to become argumentative in ordinary conversation. *Litigation* is one of the most prominent forms of interaction among the Amhara. One can scarcely spend a day in the Amhara countryside without encountering litigants, whether under a tree, at a marketplace, or in the courtyard of some lord. A nobleman can never travel about the country without being accosted on the way by litigants anxious to have him hear their stories.

Litigation is, of course, an endemic feature of peasant civilizations. Yet there can be no doubt that for the Amhara this form embodies a basic psychological disposition that differs from that of the people of other peasant civilizations. In traditional China, to take a case of marked contrast, such interpersonal conflict, far from being relished, was deliberately avoided. The Chinese considered going to court to be an extravagance, and the village judge was one of the most underemployed members of the community. In China, parties to a dispute preferred to assemble at the teahouse and to seek a solution through discussion and negotiation. The Amhara, on the other hand, seeks to maximize the opportunity for self-assertion through litigious disputes.* Ordinary sociability among the Amhara is saturated with references to litigation. Current court cases comprise one of the more common topics of conversation.

Beyond litigation, *conflict* is often expressed in more violent forms. Fights with the *dulā* erupt when altercation becomes too heated. Throwing stones is another accepted mode of combat, especially among youth. Protracted enmities tend to eventuate in such acts as house-burning, assault with swords or rifles, and (according to Amhara belief, at least) poisoning.

While it is true that Amhara culture provides means and a certain amount

* Some indication of the gross national significance of this phenomenon is afforded by the following comparison: twenty-seven high court judges are sufficient to handle the litigation for all of England and Wales; the corresponding number for Ethiopia is *one hundred and eighteen.*

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

omy during the past two decades, represents a significant growth of the capacity for voluntary formal organization in the modernizing sector.[41]

Māhebar (*Regional Associations*).—A type of formal association which has sprung up in Addis Ababa in recent years, becoming popular for the first time around 1960, is known as the *māhebar*. While its name is taken from the traditional Orthodox fraternal association, in aims and organization it is different from the religious *māhebar*. While the latter is devoted to honoring one of the saints and is convened primarily for feasting and sociability, the modern *māhebar* is organized on the basis of territorial or tribal bonds and is concerned with problems of social betterment. The first *māhebar* of this kind was established by the Gurage in the fifties.* Thereafter, the idea spread to members of other groups, and Addis Ababa residents originating in Gondar, Tigre, Harar, Manz, Tagulat, Fitche and elsewhere began to form *māhebar* of their own. The basic idea behind all these *māhebar* is to make some contribution to the welfare of the provinces through projects voluntarily financed and organized by fellow-countrymen living in the metropolis. These projects have included construction of roads, schools, and hospitals; supplying books for schools; and provision of facilities for assisting inhabitants of the provinces who come to the city. Members of the various *māhebar* convene weekly or biweekly, usually on Sunday in the vicinity of one or another of the Addis Ababa churches, to discuss their projects and make their financial contributions.

Formal Associations of Foreign Inspiration

Student Associations.—The Orthodox Students Association was founded in 1958 by a convention representing all the colleges and some of the secondary schools. Its successful establishment was due in large part to the efforts of an Indian Orthodox minister who at the time was one of the Emperor's private secretaries. There is some evidence that an earlier spontaneous effort to form such a group in the early fifties was checked by the government. Members of this association have been concerned with adapting the activities of the church to contemporary needs. They criticize the established church for its use of a dead language, excessive ritualism, and lack of teaching; and have proposed that the Orthodox Church should institute Sunday schools and

* The Gurage *māhebar* remains in a class of its own, with respect to size, wealth, and ambitiousness of program. The Gurage have also pointed the way to using the *māhebar* form in a way that transcends the narrow tribal or territorial passions which it has thus far tended to canalize. This has been done through the establishment of another, project-oriented *māhebar* concerned solely with building a road from Alam Gana to Wollamo Soddo, whose membership includes Galla and Wollamo as well as Gurage. This association has already collected well over a million dollars, and has completed the construction of a bridge. It is headed by a capable Gurage army general and its activities and collections are reported regularly in the Addis Ababa press.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
Begemder

121 nally, data were gathered relating to the modes of acquiring, exercising, validating, and conserving powers of prophylaxis, diagnosis, and therapy. Here, as in the other areas of data gathering, a necessary distinction was made between the perceptions of practitioners and those of their clients.

*793 869 75 197 539 While the secular medical traditions of Ethiopia are exclusively oral, powerful cleric healers known as debteras have traditionally employed diagnositc, prophylactic, and therapeutic texts written in Ge'ez, the language of the Church, and in the vernacular. Numerous debtera texts gave been collected in the libraries of Europe and the United States, and valuable translations, most notably by Marcel Griaule, Deborah Lifchitz, and Stefan Strelcyn, have been published. These published translations, together with translations made in the field with the assistance of clerics, have been utilized in the writing of those sections of Chapter Four dealing with the debtera's medical texts.

* 793 114 127

121 Although the focus of this dissertation is limited 171 to the region in which field research was conducted, it should not be overlooked that the Amhara share important cultural affinities with peoples, now largely Islamic, occupying lands extending from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.

000 The highlands of Begemder, Tigre, and Eritrea form